

MUSCLE CONTROL.

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MRS. WARD'S novel, "Robert Elsmere," touches upon many interesting psychological problems. Among these is that of muscle control by a foreign mind. I refer to the incident in which the heroine, blindfolded, takes her lover's hand and, without previous instruction, advances and kisses a statuette under the influence of his will. The problem here presented is startling from its suggestions of a spiritual entity or an unrecognized medium of force. The first impulse of the reader is to doubt the phenomenon. I would myself doubt it had I not personal knowledge of a similar incident. As a tribute to the veracity of the author of "Robert Elsmere," I venture to detail this incident, which occurred to me in the summer of 1881, while passing a few weeks in a boarding-house devoted to women. I was at the time convalescing from an illness which had been accompanied by great pain, and I was still very sensitive to light, sound, and, indeed, to all forms of irritation. Upon the evening in question there were twenty or thirty of us together in the parlor; and in the dearth of interest common to such occasions, one of the ladies had suggested a game in which, the subject being blindfolded, she was made to do something previously agreed upon by the company, the medium of communication being the operator's hands upon her shoulders. The proposition interested me from its assumption of power to communicate ideas by a method outside of my experience; and others failing to do so, I offered myself as the subject. I expressed myself as willing to do whatever would be required of me, thus narrowing the problem down to the simple communication of the requirement to my mind. I said, "If you can in any way make me know what I am to do, I will do it."

The game is not a new one, and is probably familiar to all.

Under the guidance of the hands on my back, I searched for lost articles, passed from one room to another, and performed a number of other feats.

So far as I had expected anything, I had expected a picture or presentment of what I was to do in such shape as to allow me to exercise my will and marshal my forces for its accomplishment, and I was prepared for considerable mental effort in grasping the idea which was to be projected into my mind. Nothing of the kind, however, happened. I was given no idea. While perfectly conscious, I proceeded blindly. I advanced very slowly, each step being taken in response to a simple loss of equilibrium. Apparently I first inclined in the direction, and then took the step to save myself from falling down. I sat, I knelt, I reached out my hand in response to similar impulses. With my mind fully awake but willingly passive, I was an automaton.

I am aware that similar exhibitions have been explained by conscious or unconscious suggestion conveyed through the hands of the operator, the weight of her body being the propelling power, and I would accept this explanation for my own case were it not for what followed. Finding me so docile, I suppose, it was determined to give me something more difficult to do. With the operator's hands upon my shoulders, I again successively felt the loss of equilibrium, and advanced as before for a number of steps, when I stood upright and then bent my head without any further forward impulse. While wondering a little at this loss of the feeling of instability, I commenced to experience a contraction in the muscle around my mouth. In a few seconds the puckering of the lips became very marked, so much so as to suggest kissing. Upon this I immediately said to myself, "If they require me to kiss any one, it will make a mistake, because that is something which I will not do." Instantly, however, I reproved myself for allowing my thoughts to wander, and said to myself, "I must forget this kissing, or I will not be able to receive the impulse and do what is required of me."

I did then succeed in putting the idea out of my mind, and resumed my previously passive, receptive condition, but no further inclination came to me. Although the operator's hands were still upon my shoulders, I had no further loss of equilibrium nor of impulse in any direction, and the experiment was then declared to have failed. It was then told to me that I had been required to kiss one of the young ladies. I had advanced to her side, but had made no further response.

It will be seen that my experiment resembled essentially that of our author.

In my experiment, as in hers, the mind of the subject had nothing to do with the result. The contraction of the orbicularis oris preceded the idea of kissing, and was the cause of its suggestion. The contraction of the orbicularis oris occurred while my mind was a blank. My experience, however, goes a step further than Mrs. Ward's. I was not led by the hand, and it was not a case of "Two minds with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one." The operator was not a stranger to me, but neither was she a personal friend. There was also no direct contact between the operator and myself, as would have been the case in a clasping of hands. Quite a number of thicknesses of clothing intervened between us.

Further, Mrs. Ward represents her subject as in an unconscious or somnambulistic state during the experiment. When it is over, she sighs, passes her hand over her eyes, and seems not to know where she is. My experiment was, on the contrary, performed with the subject fully conscious, proving that hypnotism is not essential to the result.

Truth is again stranger than fiction. The control of a circular muscle like the orbicularis is analogous to the control of the heart, said to be possible in some cases. Both would appear to be in the line of proof that, under certain conditions, the muscles of one body may be controlled by the mind belonging to another body, its own mind being passive in the matter. I should not be surprised, too, to learn that such substitution is not rare. It seems to me that the mind of the well substitutes the mind of the sick

again and again in the practice of nurses and physicians. I can recall two cases in Bellevue Hospital—cases of otherwise incoercible vomiting which were apparently controlled by such substitution. One of these was a case of pneumonia with a very high temperature during several successive days, and absolute rejection of stimulants, medicine, and food. Her condition was desperate. I remained with her for a night, and the tendency to vomit seemed to be inhibited by my keeping myself very much alert to the necessities of the case. Personal contact seemed to assist in the result. If I left her bedside for five minutes the vomiting recommenced, while holding her hand appeared to strengthen my influence. In this treatment I had at that time no theory as my guide, but simply followed an instinct in the matter. The patient was too much reduced for self-control. I did not address myself to her at all, but simply tried with all my might to do for her that which she was unable to do for herself.

In another case of incoercible vomiting, I recall the same attitude of mind. The forlorn patient was not appealed to, but as I left for the night I said to the nurse, "If that woman vomits, your reputation will be nothing with me." I was the head nurse of the ward at the time and had some dictatorial power. The woman did not vomit and made a good recovery. Both of these cases had been declared hopeless by the physicians—visiting and house; and the nurse had been left entirely without directions.

It will be seen that the experiments with hypnotism which excite so much remark belong to a somewhat different order from these which I have in mind. The hypnotized subject acts under the influence of suggestions. Mr. Croffut, a celebrated operator in hypnotism, in a recent number of the *North American Review*, remarks that he has never obtained compliance without suggestion, that is, without the spoken word, having the subject face to face, or in some other way presenting the matter before him. The subject is instigated to rob a house. The plan is first unfolded to him, and then he proceeds with intention. The operator cuts off certain faculties, but employs others. To

cut off the whole brain, or rather the whole intelligence, as in my case, simplifies the experiment. My blundering interference with complete success, is but an additional evidence of the divorcing in the experiment of the mind from the body—of that which controls from that which is controlled. In the preceding experiments my mind had had no knowledge of the meaning of my motions until they were completed. I found things without knowing that they were lost. The motions were, however, simple. The last experiment was more complex, involving in its consummation the bending of the head, the puckering of the lips, and the actual facial contact. Before consummation, it revealed its object. I found myself performing an action which was repugnant to me. The line of reasoning taken by mind is rather interesting. It at first occurred to me that kissing was a part of the experiment; but not having any idea in my previous performances, the fact of having an idea made the suggestion irrational, and by an effort of the will I banished it. I then reasoned that my mind had wandered, and that I had created the thought which I must get rid of as quickly as possible in order to assure passivity and success. I did get rid of it, but in so doing frustrated the operator's control.

Had I been hypnotized, so as to have eliminated the objecting faculty, the experiment would probably have been carried through; although Mr. Croffut relates the circumstance of a girl who could not be induced to play cards even when hypnotized on account of the strength of her moral objections.

My own experiment never has been repeated. The circumstances were written out shortly after, and later, until revived by recent discussions, it faded from my mind.